ONCURATING.org

BEING-WITH

Exhibition view *Im/Possible Community*, Shedhalle Zurich October 2010 "Undarstellbare Gemeinschaft" by p-r-o-x-y, Photo: Susi Bodmer

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BEING-WITH: COMMUNITY – ONTOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Elke Bippus, Jörg Huber, Dorothee Richter

This edition of On-Curating.org places ontological and political perspectives on notions of community at the centre of its debate. We believe that such an explicit discussion of community on a theoretical level is an urgent requirement in the context of 'curating' since cultural articulations always implicitly or explicitly address and produce communities. It was Jacques Rancière in particular who in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* pointed out the importance of access to visibility and audibility since these are what enables or prevents access to a community. "The distribution of the sensible makes visible who can participate in the communal according to what he does. A particular activity determines thus who is and is not capable of being communal."[1] In his perspective, aesthetics, visibility and politics are causally linked.

Jacques Rancière defines equality as a fundamental opposition to the police order, to the limiting power structures of a society. It is impossible for the police order to "respond to the moment of equality of speaking bodies"[2] For Rancière, equality is produced as a process in an open set of practices. He draws two conclusions from this: "First, equality is not a state, and it is not a state that an action seeks to achieve. It is not a precondition that an action sets out to verify. Second, this set of practices has no particular name. Equality has no visibility of its own. Its precondition must be understood in the practices that bring it into play and derived from their implications."[3]

According to Rancière this process approach corresponds to the traditional leftist notion of emancipation: "Emancipation is equality in actu, the logic of equality between speaking beings, which has an impact on the distribution of bodies in the community, a field characterized by inequality. How is this impact created? In order for the political to exist, there must be a space of encounter between the logic of the police and the logic of equality."[4] Following Rancière one such space of encounter would be art.

Community – how does it exist and how is it conceivable: as preliminary, anticipated, challenged, unrepresentable, inoperative, non-existent, possibly impossible ...? In the modern period the term 'community', as distinguished from 'society', has repeatedly been the subject of much debate and questioning. It is questionable on the one hand with respect to the notion and practice of a holistic ensemble, with its corresponding inclusions and exclusions, and on the other hand with respect to the philosophical and political models of Being-With, in which community is understood as an open process not subject to closure. It is questionable also because of concrete historical experiences and corresponding fantasies, failed utopias and anxieties. The debate around community in the 1980s was therefore perceived as a provocation, particularly in Germany, because of the appropriation of the term by national socialists. Today the term has been rehabilitated on the one hand and subjected to fundamental criticism because of its ontological turn on the other hand.[5]

It is remarkable, in particular, that the desire for ontology manifests in a specific historical situation: The debate around so-called communitarianism, which juxtaposed two irreconcilable positions, one republican-holistic, the other liberal-individualist, raised doubts whether community was possible at all. The notion of community did not seem to correspond with our current horizon. Numerous authors tried to position the terms that revolve around the notion of 'community' beyond concepts of communitarian collectives as derived from Marxism / communism, by relating the debates about the individual to their thinking and marking their distance to the discredited notion of a national community [Volksgemeinschaft].

What is envisioned with these endeavours and strategies is a thinking of community that does not give up a leftist (i.e. utopian or emancipatory) project but which attempts to think it under completely different auspices. The renaissance of the discussion about the community is related to political motivations, to discussions about ecological sustainability and the limits of economic growth. Debates about globalization, too, play an essential role in the strife for an adequate understanding of a post-national global community.

In their endeavour to overcome the implications

1 Rancière, Jacques: *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen, Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*, p.26 [English title: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*]

2 Rancière, Jacques: "Gibt es eine politische Philosophie?" In. Badiou et al: *Politik der Wahrheit*, 1997 Vienna, pp.64-93, here p.4

3 Ibd. p.5

4 Ibd. p.5

5 A 'return' to ontology can also be observed in authors who stand for a leftist political philosophy such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. In their third work *Common Wealth* the authors provide 'a new ontological and anthropological foundation' to political developments. Robert Zion, "Die Neukonstitution des Politischen. Mit Spinoza in den *Common Wealth*", in: *ak - analyse & kritik - zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis* | Nr. 548 | 19.03.2010

and imperatives of community thinking and to re-think community as a political demand, authors such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Robert Esposito, Maurice Blanchot, or Georgio Agamben enter a contradictory plea, which finds expression in phrases such as 'community without community' or 'unavowable', the 'inoperative' or the 'coming community'. It can therefore be said that the "quintessence of the thinking of community [consists] not only in a reformulation of the notion of community but most of all in a different *politics of community*."[6]

The current issue will be continued in a more extensive publication under the title *MIT-SEIN. Gemeinschaft — ontologische und politische Perspektivierungen* (Eds. Bippus, Huber, Richter / in German), which is intended to provide a platform for the politics of community and to place it alongside other current initiatives[7] through the work of the Institute for Critical Theory (ith) at the University of Arts, Zurich, which deals with questions of a theory of aesthetics and of the political as well as their mutual relationship. The question of community touches on the problematic issues of the aesthetic and the political registers: How do people live with each other and how do they organize such co-existence? Fundamentally, how is 'being-with' conceivable and representable? How does such 'being-with' exist, how does it happen, and how does it manifest? Such questions bring together philosophical thinking, political theories, the theory of aesthetics and the world of arts, with the aim to produce mutual irritation and inspiration for their practice. In various research projects and previous publications the ith, has already undertaken work relating to the contexts and fundamentals in these fields.[8]

Our interests in this context include the following questions: How is an ontological determination of being possible without giving up historical perspectives? What is the relationship between a community and its parts, i.e. between the communal and the entities or singularities?

Leading up to the publication the editorial team developed sustained project work[9] and a colloquium with various renowned representatives of the community debate. It is from this circle that the authors of the contributions collected here have been recruited. These contributions are concerned with more precise formulations of particular concepts, with conceivable internal structures of communities, with their institutions, practices, discourses and extents, particularly where community is conceived as a relational matter without closure.

Thomas Bedorf's contribution concerns precisely the question of relations, which need to be conceived as quasi-autonomous with respect to the specific entities, in other words, they need to be singular plural as conceived by Nancy. But according to Bedorf the thinking of community has a normative deficit caused by an insufficient differentiation between otherness and difference.

Jörn Etzold locates the debate about community and practice in Nancy, Aristotle, Arendt and Marx and points out both philosophical and political perspectives.

Lars Gertenbach indicates a number of aspects with which he argues why a theoretical consideration of community, in addition to a careful engagement with its historical semantics and the manifestations within which the concept is embedded, must crucially take place through the aspect of the imaginary.

In Ruth Sonderegger's contribution Rancière's political-theoretical approach is contrasted with his more idealistic view on the visual arts, an interesting point of departure for re-thinking Rancière.

Roberto Nigro locates the French debate about the community between the years of 1983 and 1994. It took place against the background formed by the 'crisis of Communism' and the fall of the 'Socialist' regimes in Eastern Europe. The aim was to interpret these political events in the context of the decline of the Utopian ideals cherished by the 1968 generation. Nigro sketches the debate as one episode in a long chain of intellectual thought and follows the discourse via Georges Bataille, Blanchot, Nancy, Heidegger and Esposito in order to position them both genealogically and historically.

This edition of On-Curating.org is accompanied by an artistic contribution by Michaela Melián. The sewn drawings have a double connotation as their initially harmless messages contain mysterious political subtexts revolving around perverted communities and group formations, with specific reference to real historical events.

6
Lars Gertenbach, Henning Laux, Hartmut Rosa, David Strecker, *Theorien der Gemeinschaft zur Einführung*, Hamburg, Janine Böckelmann, p. 169.

7
See among others: Gertenbach 2010, Janine Böckelmann, Claas Morgenroth (eds.), *Politik der Gemeinschaft*. Bielefeld 2008.

8
We mention, for example, the research projects on issues of migration, the construction of self and other, representative violence; the projects on performativity of theory, on the relationship between artistic practice and scientific research, on the topicality of post-structuralist theory as well as the publication on the culture of not-understanding, the imaginary, contingency and the aesthetics of critique (www.ith-z.ch).

9
Un/Mögliche Gemeinschaft. A series of events and an exhibition at the ith in collaboration with Shedhalle Zurich. Concept workshop/ talks: Elke Bippus (ith), Exhibition concept: Anke Hoffmann and Yvonne Volkart (Shedhalle Zurich) http://archiv.shedhalle.ch/dt/programm/gemeinschaft/index.shtml; *Transferzone - Temporary Life — Temporary Communities*. Concept: Dorothee Richter. With lectures, workshops and an *Archive of Shared Interests, temporary life — temporary communities*, curated by Karin Frei Bernasconi, Siri Peyer and Dorothee Richter, (White Space), Zurich. www.whitespace.ch. On the concepts and participants of the events that took place in the project *Gemeinschaft — vielleicht* see: http://www.ith-z.ch/programm/gemeinschaft-vielleicht/

CARTE BLANCHE STRASSE, 2003

Michaela Melián

Machine-sewed thread,
paper, series,
each 42 x 56 cm

Slide projection with sound,
2 slide projectors,
160 slides, CD,
variable dimensions

Music: Michaela Melián,
Strasse, 2003, 8:52 min

Produced by: Michaela Melián
and Carl Oesterhelt

This edition of On-Curating.org is accompanied by an artistic contribution by Michaela Melián. The sewn drawings have a double connotation as their initially harmless messages contain mysterious political subtexts revolving around perverted communities and group formations, with specific reference to historical events.

The drawings for *Strasse* are close to the project *Triangel*. They both relate to Bernward Vesper's novel *The Journey* (1972) in which he describes his childhood on the Triangel estate in the Lüneberg Heath, his travels, and politicization in the postwar period. The drawings produced using a sewing machine were done from photographs taken driving through Germany, in the Lüneburg Heath (Heimat-museum Neukirchen, Bergen-Belsen Memorial), on German free-ways, and sites in Munich (Odeonplatz, Hofgarten, University, High-Fish-Kommune, Frauenkommune, various of Fassbinder's film locations): The continuous machine-sewn black thread follows the outlines of landscape, buildings, and roads.

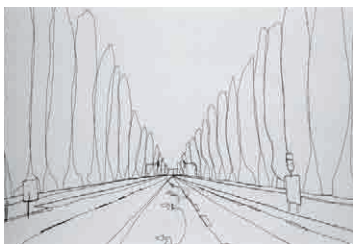
Vesper was the son of the nationalistic right wing folk poet Will Vesper. Substantial parts of his autobiographical work *Die Reise* [*The Journey*] record his childhood, school years and youth in the seemingly idyllic town of Gifhorn in the 1950s as well as his suffering under the authoritarian regime in his family in the village of Triangel.

Then he began studies of German and Sociology at the University of Tübingen. During that time he met Gudrun Ensslin, the later RAF terrorist, with whom he went on to establish the publishing house Studio Neue Literatur in 1963. On 13 May 1967 their son Felix was born in Berlin. The relationship with Ensslin broke up soon afterwards, when she met Andreas Baader and left Vesper in February 1968. Nonetheless, when Ensslin faced court for her arson attacks on the Kaufhaus shopping centre on 2nd April 1968, he stood as a witness to call for a mild verdict.

In autumn 1969 Vesper began to travel throughout Europe. He began writing his novelistic essay *The Journey* but was unable to complete it. The autobiographical fragment, in which Vesper incorporates the relationship to his father, his own radical political convictions as well as his experiences with drugs, was not published until 1977. It is regarded as one of the most influential representations of the generation of 1968 and an important historical document.

In 1971 Vesper was admitted to the psychiatric hospital Haar near Munich and subsequently transferred to the psychiatric ward of the University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf, where on 15 May 1971 he committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.

Two projectors project slides of the sewn drawings superimposed on each other, creating an impression of a film composed of stills, a kind of road movie. The soundtrack to the slide installation is based on an excerpt from the album Disaster (1973) by the band Amon Düül which grew up around Kommmune 1.




BEING OTHER, BEING DIFFERENT: A NORMATIVE GAP IN THINKING THE 'IMPOSSIBLE COMMUNITY'?

Thomas Bedorf

Thinking the community responds to a crisis in political philosophy in two ways: Against the real or alleged fragilities of modern societies it responds with the promise to provide what is 'only' society with a social connection that transcends social atomism. And it asserts its ability to provide foundations for the political arena that are more open than those provided by various forms of liberal political thought with their general affinities for rationality and consensus. It is also the promise of political foundations without the need for occidental-rational exclusions.

The point here is not a renewal of the dichotomy between community [Gemeinschaft] and society [Gesellschaft] (Tönnies), which is in itself apolitical since it juxtaposes 'the' (common) culture against the 'merely' political, thus defining the notion of community by reference to an identity which produces exclusions. It is for this reason that the new thinking of community (Blanchot, Nancy, Esposito) must seek to avoid such proximities. It can achieve this by ascribing to that notion the contours of an impossibility: by speaking of the 'unavowable' (Blanchot), the 'unrepresentable' or 'challenged' (Nancy), the 'dialectical' community (Esposito). Notwithstanding the differences in detail, a common intention unites these proposals to think community not as an entity (by whatever historical name it may be called: people, nation, culture, class) but as relation. The relations that constitute the notion of community must maintain their autonomy with regards to any possible entities to which these relational links may refer. That is what might be called the irreducibility of the relational links. Successfully maintaining the irreducibility of individuals with regards to the notion of community implies that closure of the community is impossible. Strictly speaking it even means that community does not exist, even though interrelationship as community is unavoidable. "Never identity, always identifications!" (Nancy)

These preconditions for thinking community can be explained in further detail with the help of Nancy's proposal to characterize communal being as a singular plural being: We are singularities, original albeit contingent existences (not to be confused with individuals), who never exist in isolation but always with ... With whom? With others. What the distinction between continuity and contiguity is meant to emphasize is the fact that the communal dimension is not a dimension of the existence that is 'in-each-case-mine' [jemeinig] (Heidegger) but rather something like a lateral connectedness of the many with each other. A tension exists between plurality and singularity which it is impossible to reduce either to pure subjectivity or to unbroken collectivity, since individual meaning cannot exist without relating to others at the same time.

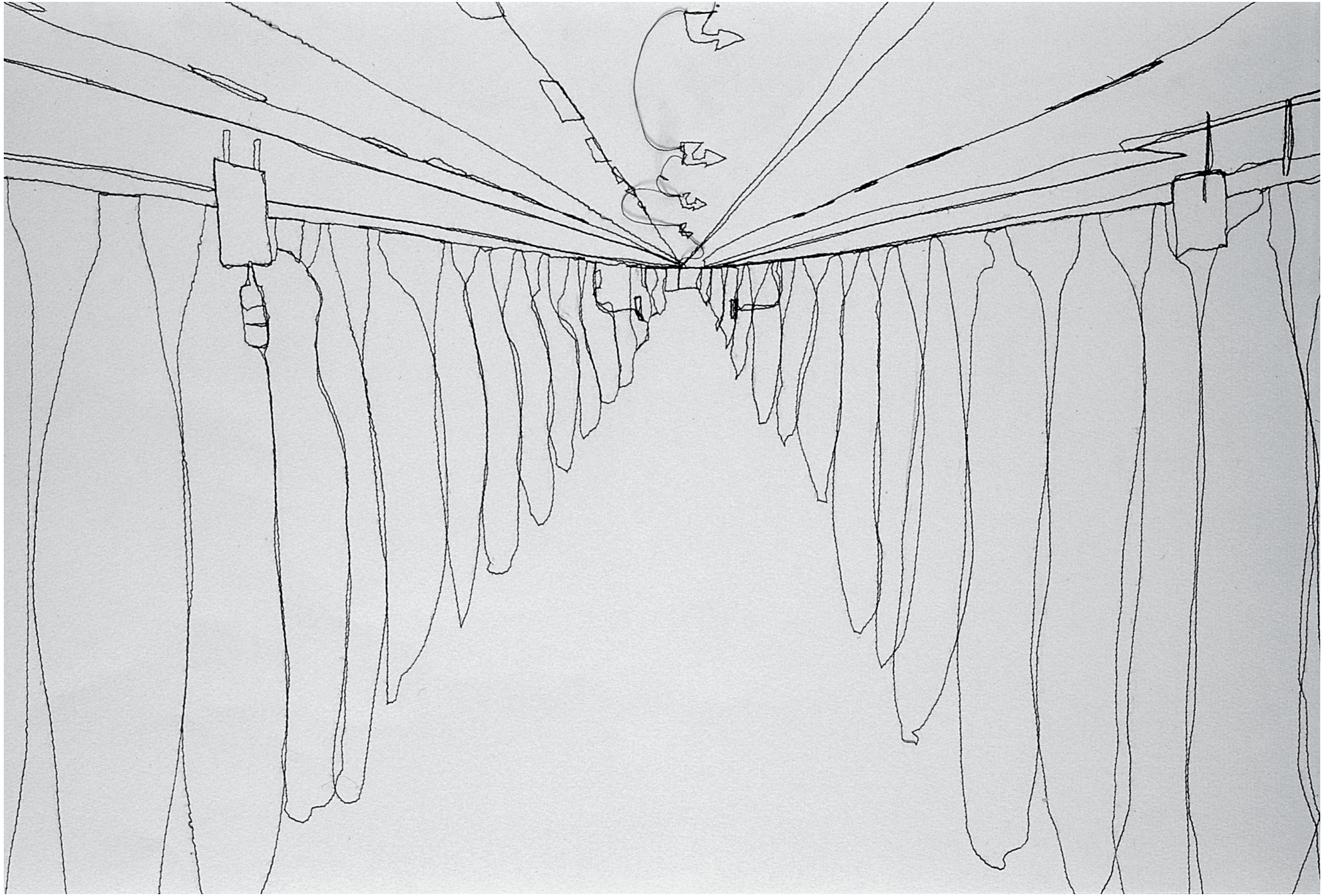
The transition from these social-philosophical descriptions to political considerations will inevitably involve a good deal of disambiguation. It is true that the protagonists of community thinking emphasize the fact that politics, particularly radical democratic politics, must be concerned precisely with not prescribing and legitimizing any institutional, judicial, ethnic, cultural, or other structures. But the 'empty space of power' (Claude Lefort) is at best a determination of the political, rather than of politics, and usually very little is said about the latter. By no means does it follow from the notion of community as a singular plural being that plurality ought to be kept open. What emerges from the thinking of community, therefore, is a normative deficit, due to the fact that otherness and difference are not sufficiently differentiated.

Ever since Plato's Sophistes the other (heteron) has been regarded as the other of the same (tauton). To speak about the one requires differentiation from the other. The pure 'One' does not speak (except perhaps to say 'Om'). The paragon for the thinkers of community is the ontological understanding of otherness as difference. While the notion of a plurality of singularities means precisely not to assume the formal identity of (otherwise different) individuals, we still lack a concept of otherness that would be able to import a normative impulse into the community.

All this could be conceivable, following Derrida, Levinas and Waldenfels, if one takes into consideration the experience of an absolute otherness with regards to which no social reference is possible because it can be experienced only as an otherness that is withheld. Structurally speaking the theory of alterity conceives of a dual otherness - one absolute and one social - although the two can never be separated. Intersubjective or social experience — assuming for the time being that such a difference makes no difference — consists in being addressed by an absolute otherness to which the experiencing subject must respond (the minimal ethics of responsibility). The address of the response, however, cannot be the (withheld) absolute Other but only the social other manifesting in roles, situations and symbolical contexts. There is therefore, in Waldenfels' words, a divergence between the origin of the address and the destination of the response.

Applying this outline of a formal theory of alterity to the politics of community results in a shift in description. We are confronted with plural singularities, but these do not merely 'exist,' they confront us with demands for us to cope with and answer to. Quite similar to the thinking of community, the social relation can therefore never be determined as a structure or identity. The social is in flux and consists in a continuous back and forth between response and demand. The perspective, however, is that of an Ego who is aware of being addressed by the Other, not the perspective of an ontologist of the social who exposes the very structures of community.

Expressing the version of the social espoused by alterity theory in terms of recognition leads to the assertion that we can recognize the Other only as a social other, i.e. as this one or that one, with such and such a culture, and with a particular role. But if this absolute Otherness, which is what makes us respondents in the first place, eludes our grasp, then every recognition must at the same time be a misrecognition. A normative tension exists therefore in the fact of social relatedness, which we can determine to be a 'misrecognizing recognition'. We are not just plural singularities. In giving recognition we are related to each other, and we must give recognition in the knowledge that complete recognition will never be possible. Nancy's slogan "Never identity, always identifications" can thus be understood not only as the expression of an irreducible difference but also as the unavoidable normalization of an irreducible alterity.



COMMUNITY AND PRACTICE: NANCY, ARISTOTLE, ARENDT, MARX

Jörn Etzold

In Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on the notion of an 'irrepresentable' or 'inoperative [desoeuvré]' community, the concept of 'practice' is particularly important. Nancy's reflections can be said to derive from two sources:

1 From a radicalized Heideggerian thinking of 'existence' [Dasein] as 'being-with' [Mit-Sein] (radicalized because it wants to eliminate any identification with a unified body politic [Volkskörper] and its myth, which is an ever-present danger in Heidegger): As finite beings we expose our surfaces to each other; this is not a sociological but an ontological determination; we are already in a community before or as we first begin to talk about it. The question of community is thus always also a question of language or, as Nancy writes, of 'literature.'

2 Secondly from a thinking of 'practice.' In *La comparution*, Nancy writes: "Praxis is community, whereas poiesis is not"[1] And already in *The Inoperative Community* he had focused on "an excess of theory (or, to be more precise, a transgression of the theoretical), which would oblige us to a different practice of discourse and of community".[2]

At this point I wish to introduce a number of questions and lines of argument related to the notion of *practice*, which Nancy links so closely with community. It is well known that practice is an Aristotelian notion. Aristotle distinguished between *poiesis*, which produces works, *theoria*, which produces notions, and *praxis*, which – as action – produces actions. Crafts belong to *poiesis*, mathematics to *theoria*, politics to *praxis*. Already Aristotle understood practice to be 'inoperative': It is defined by the fact that it does not produce any work. It is important that Aristotle often links the concept of practice to that of *bíos*, i.e. to the specific reality of life, or, as Giorgio Agamben would put it, to the 'life-form.' Aristotle thus defines tragedy as imitation (*mímesis*) of praxis and *bíos*.[3] Incidentally, the actors are always mentioned in the plural. For Aristotle, practice is thus not only related to the sheer fact of being-alive but rather to the specific manner in which human life manifests and the specific forms it takes from case to case, in other words, for the Greeks, to politics. Another interesting aspect with regards to the thinking of the community of finite beings, in the way Nancy suggests, is the fact that Aristotle ascribes practice only to mortals. Practice is not known to the cosmos or to the gods.

Taking Aristotle as a point of departure, Hannah Arendt reconstructed and radically emphasized the separation between the political and the private in Greece. *Practice*, or, in her words, *action* can only take place in a political public space, not at home. The home is subject to economy (which, of course, literally means: to the doctrine of the house), and it is here that people work merely for their livelihood, for the mere maintenance of the fact that they are alive (*zoé*), and only in the house do we find dominance: The head of the household dominates the slaves. Arendt points out that all the terms which we use today to indicate domination are derived from the private sphere. In the *polis*, however, there is not domination but equality. Political decisions are made together or against each other. In the *polis*, it is possible for practice to depend on *phronesis*, on the ability to make decisions. For Arendt, the problem of modern societies lies in the proliferation of the social into the sphere of the political. Activities and concepts that originally stem from the unfree, apolitical sphere of the home (work, domination, economy) have taken hold within society as a whole and thus made political practice impossible. In modern times we have a 'political economy,' which would have been inconceivable for the ancients. In that sense Arendt prefers the American over the French Revolution, since the social question plays less of a role in it. And that is why she reads Marx as some kind of a symptom, albeit a great one, for the amalgamation between the spheres of the political and the social.[4]

It would seem that Marx' determinations of *praxis* are indeed almost diametrically opposed to Arendt's reflections – in spite of the fact that 'practice' is one of his essential terms. It is, of course, particularly with the thinking of 'practice' that he intends to over-come Hegel. Marx does, however, appear to have two different notions of practice. On the one hand he says in his theses on Feuerbach: "All social life

1 Jean-Luc Nancy: „Das gemeinsame Erscheinen. Von der Existenz des ‚Kommunismus' zur Gemeinschaft-lichkeit der ‚Existenz'", in: Joseph Vogl (ed.): *Gemeinschaften. Positionen zu einer Philosophie des Politischen*. Frankfurt 1994, p. 167–204, here: p. 180.

2 Id: *Die undarstellbare Gemeinschaft*. Stuttgart 1988, p. 58. [Engl.: *The Inoperative Community*]

3 Artistoteles: *Poetik*. Translated by Manfred Fuhrmann. Stuttgart 1994, pp. 20f. (1450a) [Engl.: Aristotle: *Poetics*]

4 Cp. Hannah Arendt, *Vita acitva oder vom tätigen Leben*, Munich 2009 [Engl.: *The Human Condition*]

is essentially practical"[5] , i.e. any co-existence of any people at any time is practical. On the other hand he seems to envision a 'new' practice, a 'revolutionary' practice, which yet has to emerge. There are very few indications how exactly this is to come about.

While Arendt apparently intends to re-establish Greek distinctions and thus, it would seem to me, engages in what is ultimately a nostalgic discourse, Marx is free from any such nostalgia. In a sense, the 'new' practice can only be found from within modernity. Marx assumes a society that produces itself entirely through work, having thereby dissolved any particular relationships which for Arendt define 'property'. In *Capital* Marx defined the expropriations in the period of early modernity (which meant the transformation of property into personal possession) as the fundamental event of modernity. Property as imagined by Arendt, i.e. as 'proprietas' and as a safe space of retreat from the public realm which it enables in the first place, exists no longer; all property has been transformed into possession. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* the farmers realize that their "plots [...] are no longer [located] in the so-called fatherland but rather in the mortgage register".[6]

Since practice is therefore the way in which the whole of society produces itself, its individuals, its producers and consumers as well as its concepts of itself, for Marx the distinctions which Arendt seeks to (re-)introduce between the various human activities (working, making and acting) do not exist. For Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, practice is "production", or to be more precise, "production of life".[7] By giving up the distinction between working, making and acting, this 'production of life' also gives up the distinction between *bíos* and *zoé*: Through the 'production of life,' by which "the individuals [...] make *each other*", not only their political co-existence, their common life-form is produced but also life itself. "Production of life" always also includes the purely factual fundamentals of life. It is, as we would say today in Foucault's words, 'bio-politics'. It is in this sense that Marx and Engels insist that ultimately there is *no* nature. 'Nature' and thus also 'human nature' as well as the conditions of life as human creatures only exist by being produced through common practice.

For Marx and Engels such 'production of life' has always already taken place; it is a feature of any given period. But the modern era recognizes that 'concepts' (of gods, of nature) are produced through (human) practice. Man recognizes that he is no more than an object of his own practice by which individuals 'make each other'. The 'new' practice which Marx seeks is supposed to do justice to that insight.

The 'figure' of modern production of life is the *proletarian*. He is defined as a person produced exclusively through modern industrial production. He has no property and nothing to call his own; in his entire creaturely existence he is dependent on the global market. "What the wage worker appropriates through his activity is barely enough to reproduce his naked life",[8] says the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx and Engels also speak of the fact that "a universal communion of humans is posited, and thus simultaneously produces [...] the phenomenon of 'propertyless' mass in all people",[9] and further goes on to call these 'propertyless' people "individuals [...] who [...] bereft of any real life content, have become abstract individuals but who have only thus been enabled to connect with each other as individuals".[10]

It is in the 'social [!] revolution' that the 'proletarians' - as the disfigured figure of man, as the dispossessed human being – are supposed to 'make' their world, their history, themselves and everyone else. They are supposed to enable themselves not only to create something within limited conditions but to produce the 'form of interaction itself' (which is Marx' definition of 'communism'). They are able to do so precisely because they are completely dependent, in their creaturely existence, on human practice; because they are without property, without qualities, and undetermined, and thus able to reinvent any determination and quality of their practice. The danger here, however, diagnosed in precise detail by Nancy, is that of 'immanentism' – the notion that man creates himself and his world entirely as *his own work*. There is no doubt that Marx' thinking of practice has mostly been interpreted in the sense of such an 'immanentism'. It would seem to me, however, that other readings are possible. Perhaps the most important passage in this regard can be found in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. The coming revolution which Marx wishes about is here distinguished from the need of previous revolutions to imitate the past: "The beginner who has learned a new language constantly translates it back into his mother tongue. But it is only when he can move about in it without remembering back, when he forgets his native language in it, that he will have assimilated the spirit of the new language and will be able to produce freely in it".[11] And a bit further on: "The social revolution of the 19th century cannot derive poetry from the past but only from the future [...]. The revolution of the 19th century must leave the dead to bury their dead in order to arrive at its own subject matter. There the phrase transcended the content, here the content transcends the phrase".[12]

5 Marx: „Thesen über Feuerbach", in: *Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW), Vol. 3*, Berlin 1990, P. 5–7, hier: P. 7. [Engl.: *Theses on Feuerbach*]

6 Karl Marx, „Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte", in: *MEW, Vol. 8*, Berlin 1960, pp. 194-207, here: p. 203. [*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*]

7 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: „Die deutsche Ideologie", in : *MEW, Vol. 3*, pp. 5–530, hier: p. 39 [Engl.: *The German Ideology*]

8 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: „Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei", in: *MEW, Vol. 4*, Berlin 1972, pp. 459-493, here: p. 476 [Engl.: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*]

9 Ids: *Die deutsche Ideologie*, p. 35 [Engl.: *The German Ideology*]

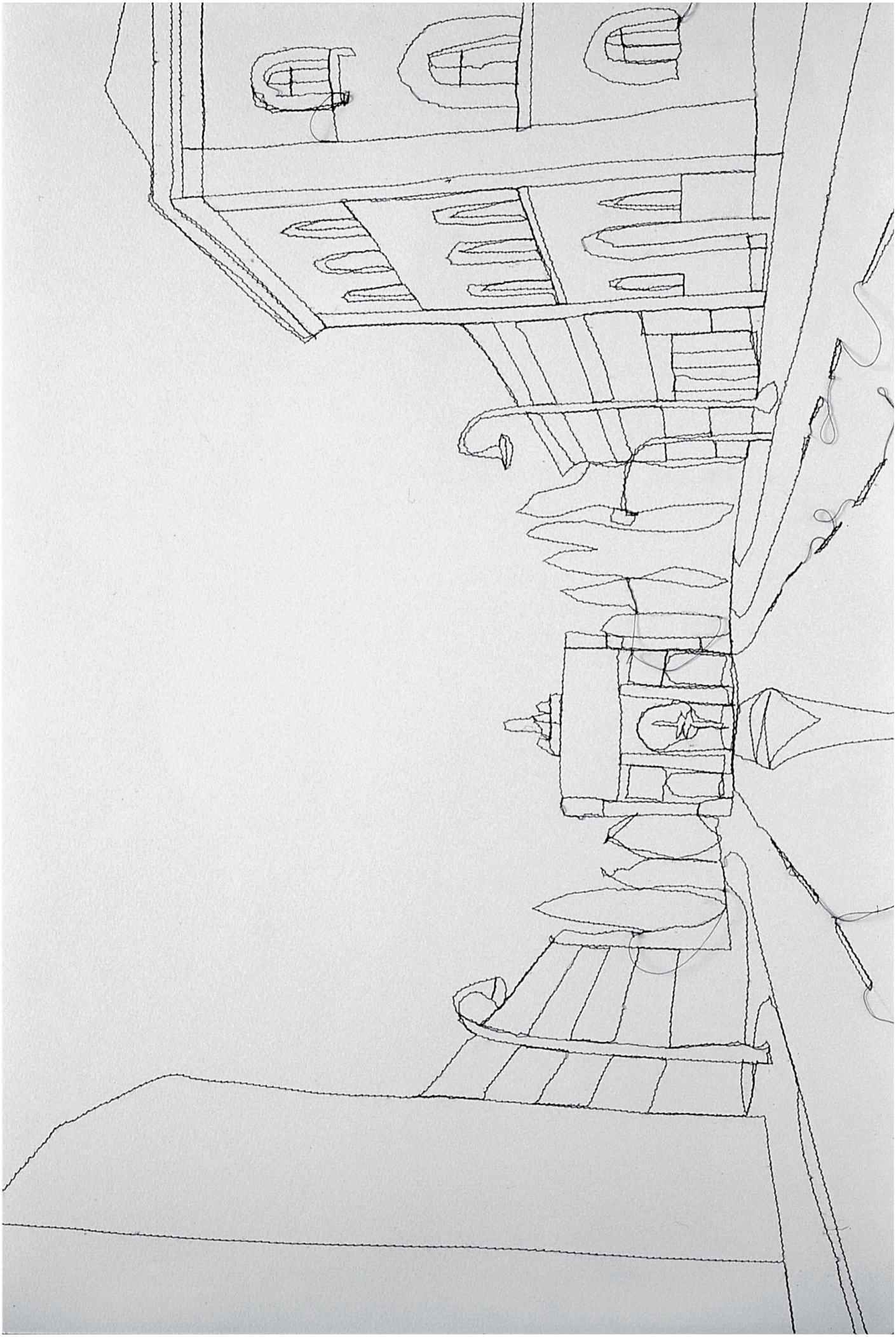
10 Ibid., p. 67.

11 Karl Marx: „Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte", in: *MEW, Vol. 8*, Berlin 1960, pp. 111-207, here: p. 115 [Engl.: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*]

12 Ibid., p. 117.

A number of questions need to be asked with regards to this passage. — The new practice is described as a 'new language' in which 'free production' is possible. Production is articulation. It is understood in the relationship between phrase and content: Which model of language and linguistic act is at play here if each phrase liberates a content that always 'transcends' it? Are we not talking here about linguistic acts that are by definition constitutive and necessarily fail to reach their content if they are to create something new, i.e. linguistic acts whose success can only be had in their failure? Is learning this 'new language' perhaps the same as "the production of the form of interaction itself"? And is such a new language possible at all — a language in which 'free production' is possible 'without remembering back' (and which has been without doubt a model for many avant-garde activists)? - What is the 'future' from which this revolutionary practice derives its 'poetry'? In French one could ask: *futur or avenir*? Is it the future known by the science of dialectics — or the future as something open and unavailable, which cannot be known? Ultimately, how can a practice be thought that derives its 'poetry' from the unavailable und thus ultimately from its finiteness? What kind of an articulation is this?

There is no space here for a more detailed consideration of these questions. I would like to state in conclusion that Marx' thinking of practice gives up both the Aristotelian distinction between *praxis*, *theoria* and *poiesis* (because all of them become a form of practice) and the Greek distinction between *bíos* and *zoé*, which carried such importance for Arendt (as well as later for Agamben). Practice is production of life. The modern era produces life. Unlike Arendt, Marx is not concerned with re-inventing the old Greek valuation of practice in this context and re-prioritizing the political over the social question, but rather with a *new thinking* of practice on the basis of these conditions. He conceives of it as a practice of articulation through which individuals create each other and which derives its 'poetry' exclusively from the future.



THE IMAGINARY AND THE ABSENCE OF COMMUNITY. REFLECTIONS ON AN ELUSIVE CATEGORY

Lars Gertenbach

Any community is constituted as imaginary. Not only does it need to be capable of being experienced as a community and possessed of an external boundary that constitutes it as the specific community that it is in the first place, it also requires a notion of itself (albeit by no means always a conscious and considered one), an idea of its unity or its commonalities in the form of a quasi-image that also becomes manifest in its practices. The concept of community necessarily depends on this anchor if it wants to be conceived and lived at all as something real, if it wishes to become effective and relevant. This imaginary moment must not be understood as a contingent supplement; it is rather a constitutive component of communities. It is situated not only in the imagination of individuals but also in the practices and manifestations of the communal itself, which constantly produce and maintain the idea of community (and thus make the community appear attractive to subjects in the first place). The imaginary is thus the opposite of illusion. It is the precondition and basis for the construction of community rather than its logically subsequent reflection.

These preambles are important to strip these reflections on the imagination of community of their apparent triviality and to indicate a few pathways for further consideration. I will state a number of aspects and attempt to explain why a theoretical reflection on community must substantially involve the aspect of the imaginary in addition to a careful engagement with its historical semantics and the social manifestations in which the concept is embedded. I will begin with a few peculiarities of the debate about community in order to delineate the place of the imaginary and conclude by outlining a number of problems confronting the community discussion.

Ever since the modern era the community debate has been characterized by a peculiar ambivalence: Community can be regarded both as the redeeming and peaceful other to the alienated modern society and as its totalitarian double.[1] Ever since community (at least in the linguistic sphere of the German language as the notion of 'Gemeinschaft') established itself in the course of the 19th century as a counterpoint to society [Gesellschaft], corresponding patterns of interpretation have become embedded in its semantics and continue to play a role in everyday discourse. Community is regarded as an instance of redemption since it promises to overcome the contingent forms of interaction of the modern era.[2] Ever since the modern era the semantics of community has thus been pervaded by a naively pious metaphoric of security, warmth and sympathy. This is particularly surprising given the fact that without a doubt its manifestations have again and again been connected with violence and mechanisms of exclusion. Communities have a unifying effect; they function as discourses of closure to the outside and (occasionally violent or enforced) harmonization on the inside. This dual front, which calibrates itself already in the period of Romanticism, is a peculiar component of the community discourse in modern times.

With regards to the interpretation of the community phenomenon this aspect appears fascinating yet at the same time it tends to elude the conceptual grasp. Two aspects are linked here: the attractiveness of the notion of community in the face of discontent with modernity, and the peculiar internal and intrinsic logic of communities which occasionally transform the need for harmony, clarity and belonging into violent excess. The reason for this dual position lies in the imaginary aspect, even when and precisely where communities have real effects beyond mere imagination (whether positively in terms of security and stabilization of personal identity or negatively in terms of violent excess and exclusion).

An emphasis on the aspect of imagination of community can be found in many authors, albeit rarely in a systematical fashion. Besides Benedict Anderson's study on the invention of the nation (Anderson 2005), which lists the factors necessary to produce the possibility for a (national) community to be imagined beyond face-to-face interactions, predominantly psychoanalytical theory patterns play a crucial role. At the same time already Durkheim stressed the fact that mechanisms of projection, transference and misrecognition play an important role in the

1 More detail in: Gertenbach et al 2010.

2 Society's approach to contingency would be likely to play a crucial part in the specific historical drama of the notion of community. Social practices that are open to contingency appear prima facie less vulnerable to regressive ideas in the affirmation of community.

production of community (cp. Durkheim 1994: 313). The decisive theoretical connection for such questions, however, is provided by psychoanalytical considerations transformed into cultural theory, for example in Žižek and Castoriadis. The imaginary is understood as a precondition and fundamental component of the social itself. The transfer of the psychoanalytic concept may be problematic but it is instructive for a number of aspects. What I find particularly interesting is the aspect of identification with the community since the component of the imaginary plays a crucial role in the question of the attachment of individuals to the community.

There is a desire for community that goes far beyond merely belonging to a group. What is true for the Ego can at least initially be assumed to be true for the phenomenon of community as well: The way in which the individual relates to the community is constituted in a process of identification with the other. Already Freud considered this with regards to mass phenomena by subsuming them under the aspect of ego-elimination and the replacement of the ego-ideal with that of the communal We (or of the leader), speaking of the 'libidinous constitution of masses' (Freud 1921: 108). Not only the affective and passionate attachment of individuals to the community but also the violence that occasionally emanates from communities can be attributed to an imaginary or phantasmatic scenario.

If we assume with Lacan that identity is constituted as imaginary, the emphasis will fall first and foremost on the fact that the notion of identity as unified homogeneity is part of the imaginary and will thus necessarily remain there. The fact that communities are constituted as imaginary also means at the same time that they will appear complete and closed only in the imaginary mode. The notion of their completeness cannot leave the sphere of the imago, which implies two crucial consequences: On the one hand it covers the real differences and heterogeneities within the group, but more importantly it also covers the fact that the gap between the real and the imaginary as such is structurally irrevocable. The complete identification promised by the imaginary cannot be achieved. Instead a moment of alienation and "non-correspondence with one's own reality" arises (Lacan 1975: 64). The imaginary thus has a paradoxical structure: On the one hand it is the production site of alienation / misrecognition, on the other hand it is also the instance which negates such alienation in favour of a fictional unity, providing the driver and motive for its denial – such as the desire to become one or to merge as posited against alienation.

This hiatus or gap, as Lacan calls it, between the imaginary and reality is constitutive. Since the imaginary promises to close and negate the abyss, a scenario arises by which the desire for identification and community can ultimately lead to the excesses of community (exclusion, violence) as much as to its jubilatory moments (inebriation, ecstasy, celebration).[3] The imaginary of the community thus plays a central role with regards to the mechanisms of exclusion and the scenarios of violence that emanate from communities, and they cannot be understood without such a concept. An approach based on these premises is based on a crucial shift in perspective: Rather than assuming the projection of community to be real, the (allegedly) real of the projection is understood as a projection of the social imaginary.

Only then does it become evident that communities – particularly national communities – again and again perceive their existence as being threatened. Žižek suspects that the reason may have something to do with what Lacan calls enjoyment (French: jouissance): a kind of painful pleasure that is inherent in any concept of community and which manifests particularly in their egocentrism and ego-intoxication. It explains not only the specific coherence of communities or the sometimes passionate support for each other but also the voluntary subjugation, particularly virulent in nationalism, of the self under the project of the community, which can even lead to self-sacrifice. To ensure this enjoyment, communities create something like a 'communal thing' (Žižek), which includes not only common symbols but also functions as a placeholder and representative of the communal. This 'communal thing' is seen as securing the enjoyment of the communal identification and is thus, for example in the projections of nationalists, always regarded as constantly threatened (particularly from the outside). Paradoxically this is conceived as "something inaccessible to the other yet at the same time threatened by him" (Žižek 1997: 137). The idea of such a threat therefore must not be misunderstood as a real scenario, since its logic is not triggered by the immediate social reality but rather by mechanisms of projection and by phantasmatic elevations of the imaginary. Relating the excesses of community to its imaginary structure also reveals that such phenomena cannot be sufficiently explained by functionalist or rationalist concepts alone.

The consequences of all this also mean that any politics in the name of community are problematic not only because differences are ignored and boundaries totalized but also because the idea of realization already misrecognizes its core and permanently defers its failure (cp. Vogl 1993). For this reason the question arises which concrete factors are responsible for the fact that in any

3
At the same time exactly that is also what makes it problematic to separate these two moments, since violence and exclusion, too, can be celebrated as ecstasy and accompanied by a jubilatory affirmation of community.

specific case the imaginary of the community can take on forms and intensities that are susceptible to lead to actual violence and direct exclusion of others. Even though the discussion of the imaginary aspects of communities initially appears capable of providing possible answers since it endeavours to explain the affective and phantasmatic structure of the desire for community, at the same time it also gives rise to doubts whether such questions can be answered at all. A theoretical recipe or a set of categories by which such communities could be distinguished from each other (and perhaps even classified into good ones and bad ones) would hardly appear to make sense since it would necessarily have to disregard the non-rational and affective moments of social relations or reduce them again to rational or functional explanations. Such an approach seems hardly persuasive, given the significance of the imaginary.

A different answer, following a non-sociological and non-rationalistic approach, could be found following Nancy or Esposito. A connection, rarely undertaken to date, between the discussion of the imaginary of the community and deconstructivist positions could be made here. Even though they are derived from different theoretical traditions, these are ultimately similar approaches to community. At the same time such a link could integrate the aspect of the imaginary into Nancy's considerations stronger than before. Although the concept has not played a central role in his explanations so far, it could help clarify certain motifs which result in his rejection of identitarian assumptions in the thinking of community.

At the same time these positions complement the discussion of the imaginary in two ways: on the one hand because the proposal is made that the semantics and the ways in which community is articulated must be clearly taken into consideration. And on the other hand because the endeavours to deconstruct the debate tend towards a different notion of community which is as distant as possible from assumptions rooted in the logic of subject and identity. With an idea of community beyond the "dialectics of origin and completion, of loss and recovery, of separation and return" (Esposito 2004: 170) it may be possible to resume certain motifs which can be connected to psychoanalytic discourse and which can equally be found in Žižek (and occasionally also in Castoriadis). It is only in such an interplay that the phenomena of society can be sufficiently grasped and at the same time critically analyzed in their premises – possibly a never-ending task but one which so far neither the psychoanalytically inspired concepts of the imaginary nor the deconstructivist positions alone have been able to tackle convincingly.

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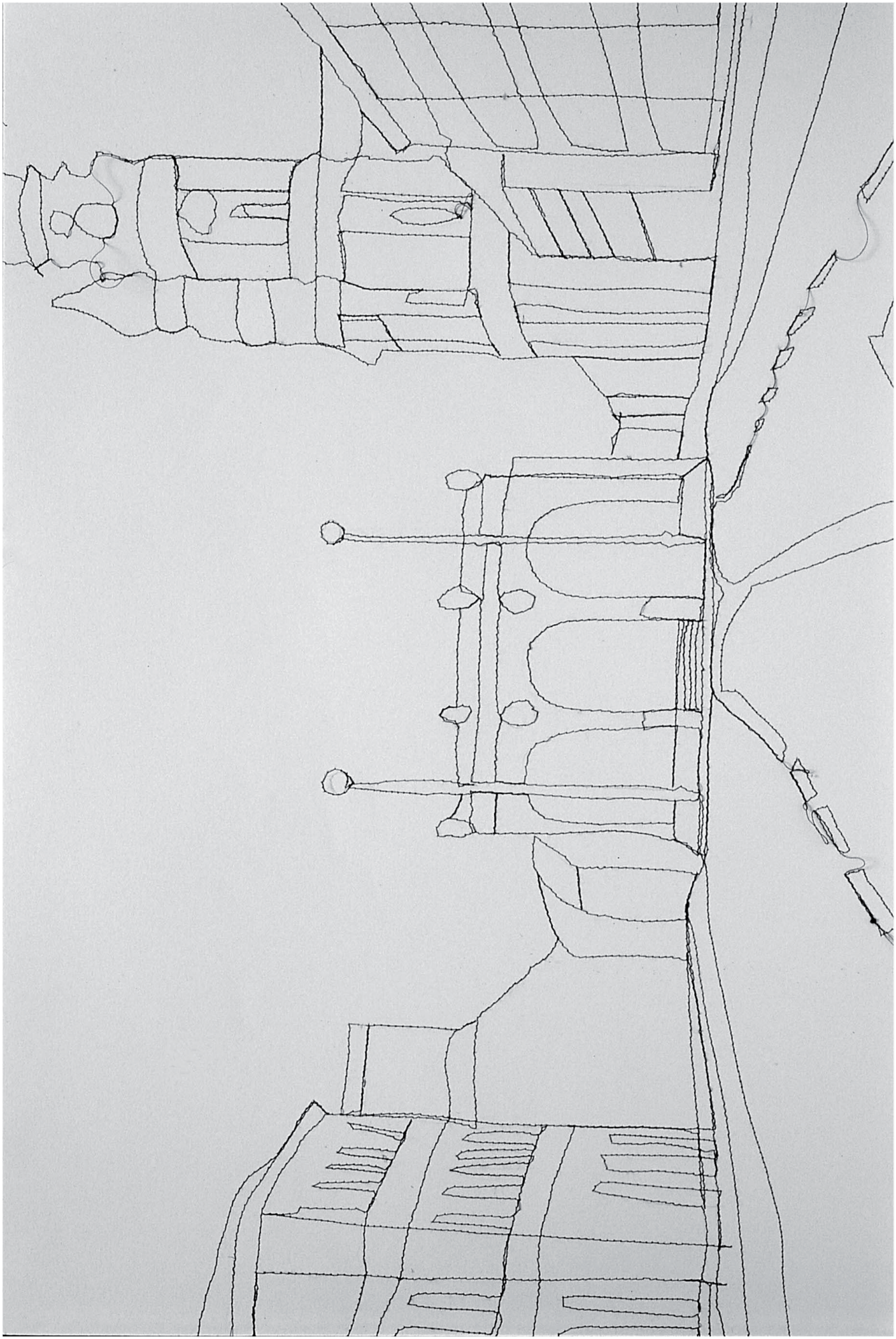


ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF A 'COMMUNITY OF EQUALS'

Ruth Sonderegger

According to the position paper for the conference the discussion should revolve around the notion of community "in the field between aesthetics and the political". I therefore want to introduce Jacques Rancière, whose reflections on community[1] are almost by definition anchored in that field. The space opened up by the aesthetic, the political and the communal is, however, complicated by the fact that Rancière assigns a key function in this space to the notion of equality, in other words to a category which – as formal or legal equality – is usually connected to the concept of society as opposed to that of community.

With the notion of a 'community of equals' Rancière does not intend to pitch societies, which claim the universality of equal rights, against communities, which claim a particular but substantial core of commonalities. Nor is Rancière concerned with a reversal of the relation – community at the expense of society. What he emphasizes is rather the common ground between the phenomena of community and society, which since Tönnies had been held to be distinct: that they are equally based on more or less hidden distributions of what is perceived, experienced and discussed, and that they thereby also determine what does not have a place in a community or society. In Rancière's view these distributions are challenged and made accessible by 'in-consistent' (CE 123) communities of equals. In other words, Tönnies' community belongs to the field addressed by Rancière as "police" (in the wide Foucauldian sense of administrative matters), or occasionally as 'politics', just as much as what he calls society. To this police order Rancière juxtaposes those rare political events that are brought about by an inconsistent community of equals.

That means, in summary: not only communities – even seemingly symmetrical communities such as monks in a monastery or workers in egalitarian communism, which Rancière analyzes in CE – but also societies that regulate the co-existence of individuals with minimalist interventions and universal laws produce exclusions. Rancière focuses on the inaudible exclusions which can become a subject matter of discourse only once a political event has brought them out of the sphere of the inaudible and made them perceptible.[2] Such inaudibility, dubbed 'disagreement' by Rancière, does not indicate a misunderstanding but rather the limits of what within a given community or society can be perceived, discussed and thus negotiated. "Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness. […] It is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued […] An extreme form of disagreement is where X cannot see the common object Y is presenting because X cannot comprehend that the sounds uttered by Y form words and chains of words similar to X's own."[3]

In Rancière's work, marking inaudible exclusions and thus bringing about political events is both a matter of aesthetics (in the sense of making something perceptible) and an issue for the community of equals, i.e. the unheard community of the included with the excluded. According to Rancière, the equality between them comes into play in the hybrid form of a presupposition. While this equality is rarely acknowledged, it is always presupposed in human activity, even in the act of exclusion. To command someone means at the same time to acknowledge that he understands, and that he understands in the same way as the person who instructs him. Even torture is administered according to what torturers perceive as humiliating and painful for people like themselves. Even in the act of exclusion the equality of the excluded with the included is thus realized at the same time as it is negated. Rancière therefore consciously and paradoxically speaks of the participation of those who have no part in the communal.

Although such references to a minimum of symmetry in situations of extremely unequal treatment sound like Habermas, Rancière does not understand them as ultimate arguments to establish equality. He is not concerned with proving that even those who kick and beat equality with their feet and fists *must* acknowledge at least a little bit of equality, and indeed have always already acknowledged it. Firstly such arguments from principles change little about the behaviours of those who are thus taught something about themselves, and secondly such arguments negate the active part[4] played by those who have been excluded in the creation of a community of equals. Most importantly, however, ultimate arguments suggest that they provide everything in terms of

1 Cp. in particular Jacques Ranciere, "Die Gemeinschaft der Gleichen", in: Joseph Vogl, *Gemeinschaften. Positionen zu einer Philosophie des Politischen*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 101-132; abbreviated here as "CE". [Engl.: *The Community of Equals*]

2 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 1999 (French 1995).

3 Ibid., p. x and p. xii..

4 Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière. Creating Equality*, Edinburgh 2008.

enlightenment and critique that it is (humanly) possible to say and do.

In Rancière's view, however, political action only begins, or could begin, at this point. But it is impossible to predict from which situations of disagreement, of which there are inconceivably many, a political event will emerge. With Rancière one can only say that a political event originates from those who are treated as unequal or who are excluded. Equality is not something that can be given or granted – as a grace or as a gift. It must be taken – because those who could give it do not even see what they are reserving for themselves. A range of rather different political events mentioned by Rancière – such as the secession of the plebeians on the Aventine Hill in Rome, Rosa Park's demand for a seat for white people on the bus, the insistence of Saint-Simonian craftsmen in the 1830s and 1840s in Paris that they be recognized as writers and philosophers – are always events in which those who have no part succeed in demanding their participation in a community of equals in such a way that the other side begins to perceive, admit, or even correct the wilfulness of the exclusion.

This presupposes that the part of those who had no part succeeds in creating a 'stage' for their demands. With this metaphor Rancière emphasizes various aesthetic moments in the demand for equality by and through resistance:

1 The categories upon which the inclusions and exclusions rest are usually not enunciated, and they are barely conscious; instead they hide in habitual patterns of action and perception. The only way in which they can be marked and denaturalized is by making them amenable to sense perception.

2 Those who have no part must constitute themselves as equals in such a way that the other side pays attention to their demonstration – and even performance – of categories of perceptibility. With respect to this self-constitution as equals Rancière also speaks of processes of 'political subjectivization'. It can consist in leaving a community of unequals (cp. the secession of the plebeians) as much as in the demand for a centre of power. The former is likely where exclusions are openly declared, the latter in case of a denial of exclusions.

On the basis of Rancière there are at least three points which I find remarkable for the discussion of contemporary notions of community:

1 His community of equals is not a regulative idea and thus not always a coming community but rather one that is always already realizable and one that has again and again been realized temporarily.

2 It can never be closed because it occurs only in a challenge to inequality and thus opens a space "in which everyone can feel themselves counted in, because it is a space in which the uncounted are counted". Since any space of the uncounted can ever be opened only with regards to a specific issue, no demonstration and taking of equality will ever be constituted in such a way that it puts an end to inequality.[5]

3 Most importantly, however, in articulating his concept of a community of equals Rancière draws attention to an agonistic structure, which will escape those who juxtapose a closed community or society with a society that "*tears itself apart*" or "*opposes itself within itself*"[6] , or a society that is essentially fragmented and which must and can affect itself by repeating yet again its unfounded founding.[7] Such conceptual models have too homogenous a conception of community and society. For they suggest that communities and societies could themselves repair or at least reflect on their crime, not once and for all but at least in a retroactive mode.

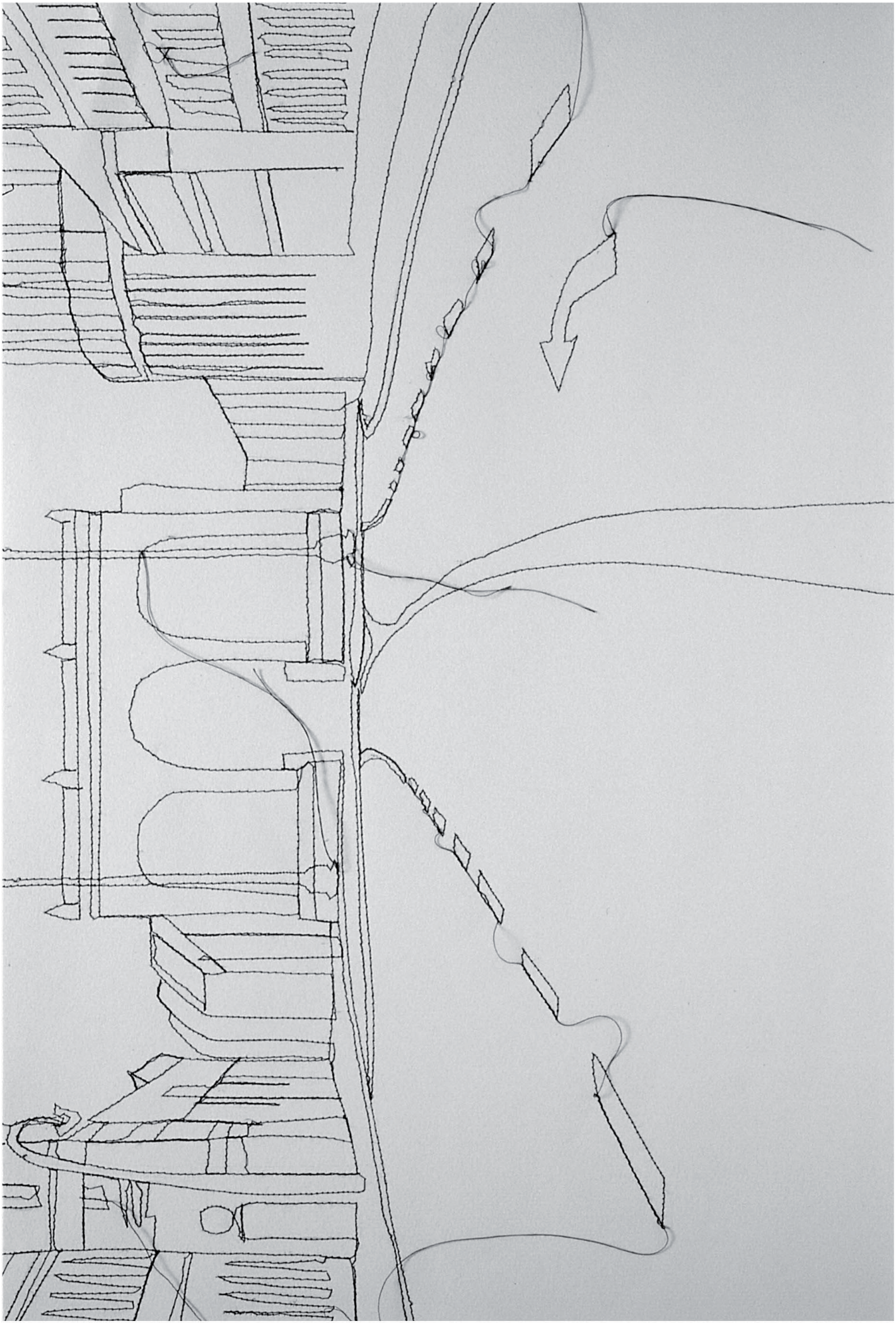
Rancière, however, insists that the fragmented communities or societies conceived, for example, by Nancy or Vogl (following Derrida and Habermas) cannot grasp their exclusions themselves. It is not the specific community or society that can critically impact on itself. Only the part of those who have no part is capable and willing in moments of political subjectivization to demonstrate to a society the structures of its distribution of the sensible and the exclusions that result from them. Rancière's insistence on the incommensurability of the perspectives of those who have no part with the representatives of the so-called 'consensus' resembles the criticism that has often been voiced with respect to Kant's abstract monological conception of the moral standpoint. According to Kant this standpoint consists in empathizing with the perspective of everyone who could be implicated, and then subjecting one's own judgement to a critique from that standpoint. This is an abstraction in the sense that only the engagement with real rather than imagined others can clarify what those others actually want. Rancière seems to make an analogous argument on the level of communities: Only those who have been excluded can represent, demand and take what has been excluded; the representatives of a structured community, however, are almost by constitution blind for that which they exclude by virtue of their categories and structures.

It would be against the background of Rancière's corrections to the discourse of necessarily split communities or societies that one would have to discuss the criticism that Rancière often understands the demonstration of dominant categories of the sensible as individual acts and has relatively little to say on the question of how collective alliances can emerge from individual political subjectivizations. Another remarkable aspect in the context of a discussion of communities in the interface between the aesthetic and the political is the fact that in his more recent reflections on art theory Rancière has increasingly transformed himself into a guardian of the boundary between the political and the aesthetic in the arts.

5 For example, Rancière discusses the question to what extent the French workers' movement of the 19th century was blind for the demands of women. Cp. Jacques Rancière and Patrick Vauday, "Going to the Expo: the worker, his wife and machines", in: Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas (eds.), *Voices of the People. The Social Life of 'La Sociale' at the end of the Second Empire*, New York and London 1988, p. 23 ff.

6 Jean Luc Nancy, *Die herausgeforderte Gemeinschaft*, Zurich/Berlin 2007, p. 14, emphasis by R.S. [Preface to the Italian edition of Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*]

7 Josef Vogl, "Einleitung", in: CE, p. 7-27, here p. 20 f., emphasis by R.S.



THE FRENCH DEBATE ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Roberto Nigro

An important moment in the debate about the community took place in France between 1983 and 1994. Its background was 'the crisis of Communism' (the fall of the 'socialist' governments in Eastern Europe was part of the zeitgeist; these political events should perhaps also be interpreted in connection with the end of the utopian ideals of 1968). Incidentally they should also be considered in connection with the emergence of liberal thought in the sense that the notion of the individual, which in a sense forms the central point of liberal thought, is the anti-thesis to any possible community. In any event the question remains: Does community stand in opposition to the individual?

The second background consists in the development of a thinking of pure communication (Habermas) as the paradigm of a new human community.

The third background was the emergence of various neo-racist movements linked to the re-emergence of forms of nationalism.

The debate about community to which I refer here is just one intellectual episode in a long chain that traverses the reflections of Western political thought. On these pages I want to make reference to just a few texts. In 1983 Jean-Luc Nancy published a text in a journal (Aléa, 4)[1] by the title *The Inoperative Community*, which contained important references to Bataille's work.

Between the 1930s and the 1950s George Bataille had written a number of texts in which he talked about the relationship between community and Communism and the 'demand of community'. In particular he developed the notion of sovereignty as an ontological and aesthetic concept.[2] The notion of sovereignty, which has nothing to do with national sovereignty, concerns that which is opposed to the dimension of submission in the human sphere. In this text, written in the 1950s, Bataille analyzed the community as a negative community, as a literary community, and as a community of love. It was in this context that he placed the relationship between Communism and community. The international political situation and the socialism of Eastern governments formed the background. But in his considerations Bataille tried to think the necessity of community beyond the political situation.

Nancy says: "Bataille initially had the bitter experience of Communism being 'betrayed'"[3]. Perhaps Blanchot responds to these words when he writes: "There is no such thing as a concept dishonoured or betrayed. What does exist are concepts that are 'inappropriate' without their actual or apparent abandonment (which is not the same as their simple negation), which prevents us from calmly rejecting or discarding them".[4]

This small book by Blanchot stands in conversation with Nancy's text. The author questions the negative community (first part) and the community of love. In doing so Blanchot relies on texts by Bataille (in a first step) and on a love story by Marguerite Duras (in a second step)[5].

In 2001 Nancy writes a preface to the Italian edition of Blanchot's *La Comunità inconfessabile*.[6] His text also appeared in France and consisted in a brief summary of the debate about the community that had taken place in the 1980s. Two concepts of this text in particular are worthy of emphasis here: Nancy remarks that already the title of Blanchot's book contains a critique of his book *The Inoperative Community*. Blanchot wrote *The Unavowable Community* in order to underline that community is unavowable. He does not want to say that community is unspeakable but that it is unavowable. Nancy understood the danger. But he did not continue the debate about the community. That is another important point, in my opinion.

He did not continue the debate because in the meantime the use of the concept of community had undergone important semantic changes. What I referred to as one of the backgrounds to this debate, the emergence of racist and nationalist movements in Europe, came into play here. Ethnic communities and nationalist identities came to the surface. The notion of community increasingly came to indicate essentialist entities referring to the idea of a substance. Already in *The Inoperative Community* Nancy had remarked: "The actual awareness of the loss of community has Christian origins"[7], and: "To this day history has been conceived against the background of the lost community — to be recovered or reconstructed"[8]. Towards the late 20th century the religious and Christian dimension returned with new and dangerous political dimensions. Nancy had already turned to different concepts, although these were concepts which (perhaps) did not contain

1 Then, Paris: Christian Bourgois éditeur, 1986. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die undarstellbare Gemeinschaft*, Edition Patricia Schwarz. Stuttgart, 1988. [Engl.: *The Inoperative Community*]

2 Georges Batailles, "La souveraineté", in *Œuvres Complètes, Vol. 8*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976. [Engl.: Sovereignty]

3 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die undarstellbare Gemeinschaft*, p. 40. [Engl.: *The Inoperative Community*]

4 Maurice Blanchot, *Die uneingestehbare Gemeinschaft*, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin, 2007, p. 10. [Engl.: *The Unavowable Community*]

5 Marguerite Duras, *La maladie de la mort*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982. [Engl.: *The Malady of Death*]

6 Milano, Edizioni SE. [Engl.: *The Unavowable Community*]

7 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die undarstellbare Gemeinschaft*, p. 28. [Engl.: *The Inoperative Community*]

8 Ibid., p. 26.

such danger: Being-with [Mitsein], Existence-with [Mitdasein], the Communal; notions which we already find in Heidegger, although they should be thought anew.

The reference to Heidegger is important for various reasons. In a book on the subject of community Roberto Esposito argued for the importance of Heidegger's work because of the way in which he thinks community on the basis of the figure of the other.[9] Community thinks itself with and through others. Although Heidegger's philosophy can sometimes contain dangerous references to the national community [Volksgemeinschaft], Heidegger knows that community can neither be reconstructed nor planned. But these intuitions about being different are even more important because they are based on a fundamental thought: Heidegger's concepts of Being-With [Mitsein] and Being-In-The-World [In-der-Welt-Sein] refer to the question of community as a question of Being-Towards-Death [Sein-zum-Tode-hin].

This analysis forms the basis of Blanchot's explanations of community. Significantly, Blanchot writes: "This is what establishes community. There would be no community if the first and last event were not communal, which for everyone cease to be capable of being communal (birth and death)."[10] The Being-Towards-Death speaks of the impossible commonality of mortal existence. Death is the true community of mortal existence.

Why is community necessary and impossible? Blanchot wonders whether community is a demand. In what sense can we speak of a demand of community? What exactly is at stake in this question of community? Blanchot remarks that it is the Communist demand, to be precise, the relationship between the demand and the possibility/ impossibility of community. Blanchot demonstrates that Bataille investigated community as a demand. Bataille presents this demand as a principle: the principle of incompleteness (*principe d'incomplétude*). In that respect, Bataille's answer to the question 'Why community?' is loud and clear: He believes that a principle of incompleteness lies in the background of all being. It is important to emphasize here, however, that this incompleteness does not demand the requirement of completion. Blanchot writes: "The insufficient being does not seek to connect with another in order to form a holistic substance with him. [...] The being does not strive to be recognized but to be contested. [...] Thus the existence of each and every being demands the other or a plurality of others. [...] For that reason the being demands a community: a finite community, since it finds its principle in the finiteness of the beings which constitute it [...] There are therefore only communities which are small in number [...] Community is therefore not, within the boundaries which it would draw for itself, the simple commonality of a shared will to be as many [...] It does not seek what could put an end to it but rather the excess of a lack which becomes more and more profound to the extent that it is satisfied"[11]. How are we to understand this insufficiency? In what is one insufficient? Blanchot explains: "The absence of community is not the failure of community: it belongs to it as its extreme moment, its ordeal, which exposes it to its necessary disappearance".[12] The community thus has the following unique position: "It takes upon itself the impossibility of its own immanence [...]. The community accepts and in a sense indicates [...] the impossibility of community".[13]

The possibility of community is connected to its impossibility. Here Blanchot demonstrates how the impossible community is linked to the question of Communism. Communism presupposes equality as the basis of its discourse. Equality presupposes the complete immanence of man. Anything that prevents man from being a purely individual reality must be eliminated. Equality demands that the individual confirms itself with its inalienable rights. Blanchot writes: "The individual asserts himself in his inalienable rights, in his refusal to have an origin other than himself, in his indifference with regards to any theoretical dependence from an other who is not an individual like him. [...] But if the relationship between man and man ceases to be a relationship of equals but rather introduces the other as unrelenting [...], a different kind of relationship posits itself [...] — a relationship that one will hardly dare call 'community' any more. Or one affirms such a designation, wondering what is at stake in the idea of community and whether it might not ultimately posit the *absence* of community, regardless of whether or not it ever existed."[14] And further: "That is indeed one of the characteristics of *community*: when this community dissolves, it leaves the impression that it could never have existed, even if it existed."[15]

The community of love (May 1968, a couple ...) is paradigmatic for the latter aspect. But there is more: The essential aim of the community of love is the destruction of society. The community of love is a war machine: "The community of the lovers [...] has as its essential aim the destruction of society. Wherever a temporary community arises between two beings, who are or are not made for each other, a war machine is constructed, or rather, the possibility of a disaster which, albeit only in infinitely small dosage, carries the threat of universal annihilation".[16]

For a certain while Esposito thought that community is what we need and what at the same time is impossible to implement. We lack what community means for us. We share the lack of community. He explains this thinking by reference to the philosophical tradition: from Heidegger to Kant, from Kant to Rousseau. Rousseau criticized Hobbes because the English philosopher had eliminated all dimensions of community with his reference to fear. Rousseau counters with concepts such as liberty, justice, equality. He concludes that community is simultaneously what we need and what is absent from our horizon.

The impossible community is thus the impossibility of thinking the proper essence of community as something that results from its historical and genealogical constitution.

9 Roberto Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e Destino della Comunità*, Torino: Einaudi, 1998 (*Communitas. The Origin and Destiny of Community*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009).

10 M. Blanchot, *Die uneingestehbare Gemeinschaft*, pp. 22-23 [Engl.: *The Unavowable Community*]

11 Ibid., pp. 15-20.

12 Ibid., p. 32.

13 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

14 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

15 Ibid., p. 92.

16 Ibid., pp. 84.

01 Im/Possible Community, workshop: *politics — aesthetics* with: Iris Dressler, Stuttgart / Oliver Marchart, Luzern / Krystian Woznicki, Berlin / 20 November 2009, 10—15 h, Shedhalle, Photo: Seán Kennedy

02 Workshop Re-Interpretation of «The Aesthetics of Terror» - a Slide Show in Two Projections with Joshua Simon, October 2009, White Space // Office for Curating / Art / Theory

03 Exhibition view *Archive of Shared Interests — Transfer Zone — Temporary Life — Temporary Communities - 30 Theoretical approaches, architectural and artistic dossiers for communities in the Transfer Zone*, October 2009, White Space // Office for Curating / Art / Theory, Photo: Megan Hall

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